

# 2020-2021 Wild Turkey Hunting Seasons and Quota Ranges Justifications

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# 2020-2021 Wild Turkey Hunting Seasons and Quota Ranges Justifications

## MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Species: Spring Turkey Season Quota Adjustment

Region: 4

Hunting District: Chouteau (R4 portion), Toole, Pondera, Liberty, and Teton Counties

Year: 2020

LPT: 400-20

1. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). **REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

2. **What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The proposal is to provide additional spring hunting opportunity in response to increasing turkey numbers by increasing 400-20 spring turkey licenses from 5 to 20 in the northern portion of Region 4. The new spring gobbler season proposed will be a limited entry special permit (by drawing only) offering 20 permits for the spring 2020 season.

3. **How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

This increase will provide additional recreational opportunities to the public who have shown an increasing interest for wild turkeys in Region 4. Benefits of the increased number of licenses expanded opportunities for the public and Landowners to hunt/view/listen to wild turkeys, improved Landowner relations with FWP and the public, and potential added revenue to the local economy from expenditures by turkey hunters and viewers. Success of the increased number of licenses will be increased public turkey hunting opportunity. Turkey populations have increased in recent years to allow a reasonable amount of harvest opportunity. Another success of the proposal will be providing a tool for area landowners experiencing damage. Depending on winter severity and turkey populations, some landowners experiencing turkey game damage and expressed disappointment that additional turkey harvest was not available to disperse resident turkeys.

4. **What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Until the early 2000's, there was a limited entry spring gobbler season in Toole and Pondera Counties, along with an unlimited fall season in the Chouteau County portion of Region 4. These seasons were closed due to declining bird numbers and a lack hunter/landowner support for the fall season in the Region 4 portion of Chouteau County. In recent years, numbers have been slowing increasing and expanding along the Missouri, Teton and Marias drainages. Field biologist, landowner and hunter observations of turkeys on the Marias River west of Interstate 15 of flocks exceeding 40 turkeys are not uncommon. Landowners in the same area frequently report turkey observations. Recent turkey damage on the Marias River east of Interstate 15 included estimates of approximately 60 birds. Other populations of birds inhabit areas on the Teton River below Tiber dam, near the Dent Bridge, downstream along the lower Marias River and at the confluence of the Marias, Teton and Missouri Rivers near Loma.

5. **Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

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Recent climatic conditions have allowed turkey populations to increase to sufficient levels to offer additional turkey hunting opportunity. Hunter access to turkeys should remain good throughout the area. There are several large Block Management Areas along the lower Marias and Teton Rivers, along with scattered public lands. Private land access should also be good throughout.

**6. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

In previous meetings landowners near the confluence of the Marias, Teton and Missouri Rivers have expressed wanting to see wild turkey populations increased to a huntable population. Limited number of permits and favorable climatic conditions have allowed turkey populations to increase sufficiently to allow greater spring turkey hunting opportunity. Meetings with these landowners in the past were very successful in securing release sites, habitat availability and access for the public.

Area sportspeople, including the National Wild Turkey Federation, SCI, Russell Country Sportsmen, Conrad Sportsman Alliance, and Montana Sportsmen Alliance are in full support of turkey hunting opportunities and turkey management in the area.

Landowners over the past few years have commented on increased number of birds increased opportunity for hunters.

Submitted by: **Jake Doggett & Ryan Rauscher, FWP Area Wildlife Biologists, Great Falls and Conrad**

Date: **11/14/2019**

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name / Date

Reason for Modification:

# 2020-2021 Wild Turkey Hunting Seasons and Quota Ranges Justifications

## HUNTING SEASON / QUOTA CHANGE SUPPORTING INFORMATION

**Species:** Turkey

**Region:** 4

**Hunting District:** 445 (Cascade County)

**Year:** 2020

**LPT:** 445-20

- 7. Describe the proposed season / quotas changes and provide a summary of prior history (i.e., prior history of permits, season types, etc.). REMEMBER THIS STEP IS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE INITIAL ENTRY INTO THE DATABASE—SO FOLKS CAN START THIS NARRATIVE WITH #2 BELOW.**

Increase the number of 445-20 spring turkey gobbler licenses from 15 to 20.

- 8. What is the objective of this proposed change? This could be a specific harvest amount or resulting population level or number of game damage complaints, etc.**

The objective of the proposal is to provide additional turkey hunting opportunities. Proposal will also direct hunters to landowner with growing turkey populations to potentially alleviate damage.

- 9. How will the success of this proposal be measured? This could be annual game or harvest surveys, game damage complaints, etc.**

Success will be measured by increased hunter opportunity, landowner feedback and hunter-harvest surveys.

- 10. What is the current population's status in relation to the management objectives? (i.e., state management objectives from management plan if applicable; provide current and prior years of population survey, harvest, or other pertinent information).**

Turkey populations in HD 445 are robust and continue to expand throughout the Missouri River corridor Expansion and increased populations are occurring on the lower Smith River and north Little Belt Mountains near Belt Creek. Anecdotal evidence suggests numbers are stable or growing. Feedback from both traditional and non-traditional landowners suggest habitat is available and bird numbers are increasing. In 2016, 75% of license holders were successful in harvesting a male turkey. This rate is higher than average success rates elsewhere in Montana (~50%) and suggests hunters are indeed able to find and harvest birds.

- 11. Provide information related to any weather/habitat factors, public or private land use or resident and nonresident hunting opportunity that have relevance to this change (i.e., habitat security, hunter access, vegetation surveys, weather index, snow conditions, and temperature / precipitation information).**

Habitat quality in the hunting district is relatively stable. Cottonwood/shrub riparian habitat intermixed with cropland along both the Missouri and lower stretches of the Smith Rivers support acceptable survival rates during long, cold winters. Land use in the foothills of the Little Belts has not changed drastically and hunting opportunities continue to improve. While residential development continues to expand south of Great Falls, historical access opportunities remain available (several conservation easements and state lands). Private landowner tolerance for turkey hunting is stable or increasing. Continued turkey expansion up the Smith River has the potential to increase spring hunting opportunities in the future.

- 12. Briefly describe the contacts you have made with individual sportsmen or landowners, public groups or organizations regarding this proposal and indicate their comments (both pro and con).**

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Each year the regional office responds to reports of turkeys in newly-developed residential areas. Many reports suggest turkey numbers are increasing. Reports suggest people support a modest number of turkey but recognize overabundance can create damage and safety concerns. Reports of there being too few turkeys by both hunters and non-hunters are rare. Turkey hunting around the Great Falls area still feels like a new opportunity for many hunters. Making available five additional licenses is consistent with incremental changes in 2015 and 2017. The proposal would complement those in the HD 400 where an increase in licenses is also proposed; 20 licenses would be available in each hunting district in 2020. The proposal was discussed with many landowners in the Ft. Benton and Loma area, all promoting the increase in licenses and opportunity. Some landowners have enrolled their land in spring turkey for Block Management. Support for the proposal also provided by Russell Country Sportsmen, SCI and NWTF at the local level. Area Game Wardens Jim Smolczynski, Dave Holland, Trenton Farmer and Keith Knighton all support the proposal.

Submitted by: Jake Doggett, Great Falls Area Biologist, FWP

Date: 11/15/2019

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Supervisor / Date

Disapproved / Modified by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name / Date

Reason for Modification: